

Interview with Rob Griffiths - The Fiction, Little Murders, for Modern Times

1. To backtrack quite a bit, can you tell us when the Little Murders formed and played their first gig?

Little Murders formed in 1979 and played their first proper gig in, I think, September of that year at a pub in Fitzroy called the Champion Hotel. The first Little Murders gig whatsoever was at Bruce Milne's (Au Go Go Records founder) and Clinton Walker's (writer) birthday party in August 79. But we had to borrow a drummer for that one, which was Phil Brophy from Tch Tch Tch. The first line up was Clint Small, Ken Hamilton and I. Then Rod Flegg joined and a few weeks later we started playing regularly.

2. What reasons made you form a band and was it difficult?

Little Murders came from the breakup of my previous band The Fiction a punk outfit from 1978. However, what made us different from the others is we started wearing suits on stage and sticking 60's covers in the set. One review said we were like The Saints meet the Monkees. By the end of the year, it was falling apart but after forming a friendship with Bruce Milne who had just started up the Au Go Go label, I really wanted to make an indie record. So basically, we took in the Fiction to record 3 songs. If you ever see the record, it says The Little Murders EP when they're only 2 songs on it "Things will be Different" and 'Take Me I'm Yours" the third song wasn't finished in time and ended up on the flipside of our second single. However, the band didn't know that the record was coming out as Little Murders, a name I'd already planned and incidentally included in the lyrics to "Take Me, I'm Yours", so I don't think they were too happy about that. With the record ready for release, I recruited the new guys except for Ken who was in Fiction. When the record came out it got such great reviews and airplay that we started gigging from the week it was released.

2 months later I'm over in England where the Mod thing is everywhere, and it just pulls together all the ideas floating around my head for what a band should be about. "Eton Rifles: is in the top 10, scooters everywhere, kids dancing to "Green Onions" in a record shop off Leicester Square. I saw a few mod bands over there "Purple Hearts" stand out and I liked the way they incorporated a soul/ska disco into the nights preceding, something Little Murders would use when setting up the mod nights at the Market Hotel Back in Melbourne we ditch the guitarist and bring in our producer and flashy dresser Stuart Beatty on guitar. Ken leaves for personal reasons and Steve Fuzezi auditions in a suit for a bass. We start draping flags over the amps, dressed up sharply for gigs and it felt like a real band.

3. *Were those days of Mod made up of sleepless nights of playing or were gigs few and far between?*

We established a rapport with the audience straight away, so we were playing constantly sometimes twice a night. Because we were a bit of a draw for punters, we would support a touring band then go off and do our own thing. Then I'd be off to a mod party somewhere. And on Wednesdays there was a club called Kommotion where I would DJ a bit. Luckily, we had some of 'Mother's Little Helpers' to kick us along. Sundays was saved for the week's hangover.

4. *Did you form an alliance with any other mod bands?*

There wasn't much in the way of Mod bands about at the time. We gave 5:15 and Bleu Scooters a couple of supports but most the bands weren't ready for the pub scene where we were prowling. Some of the bands were pretty dodgy too. I got on pretty well with Ronnie Williams (5:15) who was pretty much an instigator of Mod happenings. Later we teamed up with Ronnie and Gary Lake from 5:15 for a couple of gigs as Blow Up.

5. What was the typical weekend in the life of Rob Griffiths at that time?

The weekend.... get home from my 9-5 job on a Friday arvo. After a few drinks, quick recharge nap and off to a gig...usually the Crystal Ballroom in St. Kilda or the Jump Club. On to a party. Home sleep wake up eat smoke go shopping for clothes, usually op shops, look for records in the city, off to an out-of-town gig, drive back to Melbourne and either go to a party (no party too small) or have a drink at the Jump Club in Collingwood.

6. Members have come and gone throughout your musical career, are you a hard person to work with?

We've had some constant line ups.one lasted over 2 years. I don't think I'm hard to get on with it's just that the band runs its course, the band breaks up and then for some reason it starts all over again. Believe me we've had plenty of farewell gigs in our time.

7. In releasing your CD "...and stuff like that" how and why did you go about that?

"...and stuff like that" came about because I write songs and it's pointless to write songs if no one hears them. Basically in 94 I went into the studio with the same idea I had in 78. Make a record then form a band. The basic premise was to release a record under a new name which was going to be "Pretty Green". A couple of years later I have a record label and I'm out mixing with bands again (after 9 years DJing) live and in the studio. The bug took a big bite this time and in 96 I got some more musicians and finished off what I started. After recording it was obviously a Little Murders record.

8. Why did you include some older tracks?

It was just a gathering of Little Murders stuff the original idea was to mix the album up with old and new tracks next to each other. The Murder tracks we re-recorded were from our first album "Stop" which was basically the singles plus demos. These demos were taken from cassette tape and were basically in a shitty state made even more obvious by cd technology. And anyway, they were the demos and deserved a bit more attention. Listening back to it there are still some tracks that need attention, I'm thinking of "Anything" which really needs to be re-done.

9. Has the fire ever burnt out in the Little Murders soul at any stage?

God yeah. Back in 81 I gave up after "She Let's Me know" was out and I went through 3-line ups in a space of 8 months Luckily I secured a great band after that which included Mick Barclay who went on to Paul Kelly and weddings parties anything and Rod Hayward who was in Dave Grayney's band. That line up was the longest lasting and extremely satisfying to be in. Unluckily that folded in 84 and the next line up spelled the end for me. One line up too far I'd say.

10. Do you consider yourself a Mod?

Hard question that one. I've still got my union jack coat in the wardrobe, which was made by Paul Weller's tailor, mind you. I'm still fascinated by the whole mod culture but as Don Hosie says I used to be a mod. There are still aspects interwoven into my life and in my writing. I feel "White Line/ Black Day" on the new cd is very much a mod song. I'm still terribly a sixties nut with a modern soul.

11. *"Things will be Different" has become probably one of the most revered songs by mods in Australia, tell us about writing and recording it and what brought it about?*

Things will be different was the first song I ever recorded in a studio when the Fiction went into this little studio in Carlton in 78 and recorded 4 tracks including a cover of the Troggs "With a Girl Like you". Things was written a few months before when my writing turned around in style from punk to something a little more melodic and 60's. The song was written about living in the suburbs and playing in the city plus a few references to girlfriends etc. It was originally played to a similar beat as "Be My baby" by the Ronnettes. Later when we went to record it for the Murders debut single, we made it faster and put an acoustic bit through the first verse. Later we changed it to a chunka chunka guitar. Since we recorded the first bit last so to speak it took us ages to fit the two bits together. Since then, it became the cornerstone of the Little Murders live show. We rerecorded it in 82, which is the version on the cd. Also, Weddings Parties Anything covered it on the b-side of "Mondays experts". Interesting fact Mick Thomas of WPA auditioned for Little Murders and not getting into the band he went off and formed his own with the drummer who was also auditioning, and the rest is their history.

12. *In the earlier days you had a journey or two back to the UK. How did it compare, and did it inspire or change you?*

As I said before my visits to England changed my approach to music. Seeing the Purple Hearts in Scotland was fantastic. I also caught the Dolly Mixtures in London around that time. I only found out recently that the band that supported them which was called V2 was actually U2 on one of their first forays into England. I remember them being quite naff and a bit of a throwback to pre-punk days. Another big influence on my music from those visits back to the UK was going out dancing in Blackpool, my hometown, at the Blackpool Mecca where Northern soul was king. Little Murders sets always had a few soul covers in their somewhere.

13. *Easter 1981 in Melbourne saw the biggest gathering of Mods Australia has ever seen, did you enjoy yourself over the long weekend and do you have any memorable experiences you'd like to share?*

Easter 81 was incredible. A long weekend of full-on party. We were playing the Jump Club and it was about 30 minutes before we were to come on stage and there were about 20 people there and we thought it was going to be shit. I popped over the road to get some fags and when I walked back in the place was full. The Mods Melbourne and Sydney all turned up together. That night was mad. The Ballroom gig was over the top. I remember going to Luna Park after staying up all night partying and feeling 2 seconds close to death but still going on the rides. Flash. Glyn W spray-painting Sets + Little Murders = God on the side of a church in Fitzroy. A bunch of hoons throwing a firebomb at the scooters outside Macy's. I remember stuff but can't seem to get it in the right order. Blame it on the chemicals.

14. *Do you think you've written the ultimate mod song in any of your material?*

The ultimate mod song. I don't think you can top "My Generation" "Midnight hour" or any of those classics. I've written about mod. Basically, it's about what other people get out of my songs.

15. *Tell us about "First Light" and "We Should Be Home by Now" your last 2 releases?*

Well, "First Light" is not all that new now. It started out as a bit of a song story but that went out the window pretty quick. If you program it in a particular order, you get the idea, kind of. "White line" is a mod experience you're your basic wake up how am I going to get through the day type thing. And then it goes on. Mojo (UK music magazine) compared it Joe Strummer singing with The Jam, which I thought was great.

They also mentioned Wilco, but I see certain bits of Teenage Fanclub instead. All in all I think it's a good record.

16. *What's in the pipeline for Swerve and Little Murders?*

Swerve is a bit quiet at the moment. We've just released a compilation/sampler. No new records til the next century. Should be a new Little Murders next year and maybe a Quincy McLean album?

17. *Anything else you'd like to add?*

The eighties mod scene was an absolute blast until it fell apart through elitism and in fighting but I'm sure anyone into mod had a great time and can't shake off the influences. I was watching the telly the other day and Kate Ceberano film clip was on for "New Romantic". Now back in the Batcave days Kate and her brother Phil were well-dressed young Mods, and you can see in the film clip they haven't forgot the style. I remember Phil was a very snappy dresser. Anyway, the Mod/sixties look is still associated with being cool. You can see it all through media/music/fashion. Personally, I love it! Did I mention how cool I think Michael Caine is? But that's another story....